facilitate phasing out subsidies on petroleum products; and a modest increase in the postal rates in view of the rising cost of postal services.

VRS in all Union Ministries

1725. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Expenditure Reforms Commission has favoured the introduction of Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) in virtually all Union Ministries;

(b) whether Government have decided "to take up for consideration VRS for Central Ministries" as reported in the Hindustan Times dated 5th February, 2002;

(c) if so, the Ministries/Departments which likely to be covered under VRS indicating names Ministry-wise, Department-wise strength-wise/amount-wise reduction in the each case, if implemented; and

(d) the reaction of the Central Government Employees Trade Unions to such plans of VRS?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) and (b) The Expenditure Reforms Commission, while recommending optimization of Government staff strength had suggested a liberal Voluntary Retirement Scheme for the employees declared surplus. In pursuance thereof, the Central Government have introduced a Special Voluntary Retirement Scheme for Surplus Central Government Employees on 28.2.2002.

(c) Identification of surplus employees for the purpose of VRS is to be done by the individual Ministries/Departments as per the prescribed procedure. In order to keep a close watch on the implementation of the scheme, all Ministries/Departments have been instructed to submit quarterly returns to the Surplus Cell of Department of Personnel and Training.

(d) Consequent to the issue of order dated 28th February, 2002, no specific reactions have been received from the Central Government Employees Trade Unions.

Agricultural loans to women

1726. DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some banks are not extending agricultural loans to women;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) whether Government propose to take steps to provide such loans to women?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise in view of (a) above.

(c) As per extant policy of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), all domestic scheduled commercial banks are required to lend 18 per cent of their Net Bank Credit to agriculture. There is no distinction to be made on the basis of gender. However, with a view to strengthening the credit delivery to women, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has advised all public sector banks to earmark 5 per cent of their Net Bank Credit (NBC) for lending to women by 31st March, 2004. This is expected to boost agricultural lending to women as well.

Model stock market exchange

†1727. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government would consider to set up a model exchange with a view to keep in declining confidence of investors in share market as well as to maintain the credibility of share workers;

(b) if so, by when; and

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.